

CRISES

Excomm phenomenon

Adapted above all to privacy; plus vehicle for fast, coordinated high-level advice to the President (in situation where Presidential decision is key element).

If process is to be improved, it must allow for better staffwork, including anticipation, while preserving (a) privacy, and (b) recognizing key role of President (i.e., recognizing that situation is not suitable for resolution within any one of the National Security Departments, nor within the National Security Establishment as a whole (i.e., involves politics, domestic considerations, Pres budget, Congress, public, Pres commitments, etc.). (plus Pres judgments, desires, beliefs: desire to exercise his Constitutional powers personally).

EXCOMM AS THE PRESIDENT'S STAFF (not as a "national decision-making body")

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Violent Acts as Threats:

In "communicating" with violent actions, President/government will not want to be fully committed to a specific program, goal, prediction, or to carrying out major actions; given Presidential misgivings and bureaucratic controversy, there will be desire to be able to draw back, stop, reinterpret goals and desires and expectations, put out various public explanations, etc. Moreover, during early period of uncertainty as to reactions of public, various enemies and opponents, there will be special desire for hedging, insurance. Moreover, it will be so hard to get agreement to violent action that the process of achieving it will involve various departmental compromises--to get everyone on board.

Result: EARLY ACTIONS WILL BE PARTICULARLY AMBIGUOUS: both in their own nature and targets and in context with (varying) public statements.

As actions continue, they might grow increasingly unambiguous--w.r.t. the intentions of the time. But these intentions may have changed from initial ones; and for a time, later acts may be ambiguous in the context of earlier ones.

Moreover--contributing to ambiguity--there are always multiple audiences (especially because a violent act has such a loud "Hey!" or attention-getting effect, worldwide); and, as part of the agreement-achieving process, it will probably be necessary to avoid resolving important questions of future programs or more ultimate goals, so as to get clearances from various people with different views as to follow-up. Thus, these questions will not, in fact, have been "made" within the government (in particular, the President may not be "on board" as regards the "next step" and the intention); hence, act will not be tailored to communicate unambiguously a particular intent/message, and accompanying public statements will not be able to communicate "the decision."

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Surprise and consensus

Hypothesis: members of, e.g., USIB, know that their estimates must be unanimous to be effective.

Therefore: (a) A member who threatens to footnote has great bargaining leverage with those who want badly to be effective with a particular estimate; he can get them to make concessions on wording, strength of conclusions, etc.; though they must make trades between effectiveness as a function of unanimity and effectiveness as a function of strength of conclusion.

(e.g., others may think that X is highly probable; they want very much to get President to act as if X were at least fairly probable. Rather than have an estimate with a footnote saying that one member thinks X is highly improbable--which might totally neutralize the effect of the estimate--they may agree to say that X is fairly probable.)

b) Bargaining. The same member who disagrees knows that he can be punished for his footnote by having the others footnote estimates when he wants unanimity so as to be effective, more strongly than they do at the time. At the least, others will not be disposed to "do him a favor" by shading their own opinions in the direction of unanimity with ~~his~~, on these future occasions. Hence, incentives to "get in line."

The first effect applies even on a "one-shot" estimate with an ad hoc committee; the second works in favor of unanimity in a continuing group of estimators, like the USIB (or advisors, like the SAB?) (SAB too big for this effect?)

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Issue of responsibility: the implications of admitting that something had been decided at a high level, or by a civilian or by State; or of claiming that something had been delegated, or was "conventional" or was up or not up for "consideration" (i.e., we might not have done it, or might yet reverse it-- if pressures were mobilized)

NYT March 20, 1965: Jack Raymond; "The US, apparently in a change of policy, is using napalm bombs in aerial strikes against NVN...Emphasizing that napalm bombs are considered 'conventional ordnance,' officials said today that commanders had the authority to use or not to use them, depending on military requirements....Sylvester said that napalm bombs were not used until now against NVN because commanders 'had not considered it necessary.' He said authority of use of the bombs in the hostilities in VN rested with PacCom Hq in Honolulu and commanders in Saigon. The Pentagon, he said, was not called upon to authorize their use specifically in the latest raids, nor was it notified in advance. That they had been used was reported to Washington along with other details, he said."

((Context: a week after gas story. Can't describe something as a "detail" and at same time admit it is subject of Presidential/State decision; also, admitting it is change of high-level policy raises questions of why policy was changed; allows criticism of calculations. "Why not earlier? Why now?"

Like gas--used against Buddhists but not allowed against VC (by public)--napalm had been used against VC in SVN but not before in NVN.